

KART

Preliminary Autism Taskforce Recommendations Related to the

Training and Employment

For individuals with Autism Spectrum & Related Disorders

The Senate Select Committee on Autism & Related Disorders

(July 13, 2010)

Overarching Problems and Challenges:

1. **A significant barrier for individuals with ASD to attain and maintain employment is their lack of understanding of social situations and how to respond to these situations in a culturally normative way.** To equip these individuals with social skills necessary, as well as provide an appropriate timeframe in which to learn, our recommendation is:
 - a. **Implementation of an approved social skills curriculum to identified students beginning in the 5th/6th grade (ages 10-11 years) and continue through completion of high school. Best practice would be for Kern County Schools to adopt the same model. The social skills curriculum is to be implemented by the classroom teacher. Cost estimate ranges from \$500 to \$1,200 per school. The IEP is to include specific objectives and goals included in the curriculum. The student, teacher, and family would work together to ensure cohesion and transfer of classroom instruction into real-life situations. Implementation of a sequential and thoughtful course of social skills instruction and training with an extended timeframe will be young adults having ASD who are socially equipped to maintain employment. The potential cost savings of this instruction and training would be measured over the lifespan of an individual with ASD who is able to maintain employment and no longer needs Supplemental Security Income. (40 year employment period could potentially equal a combined federal and state savings totaling \$408,000).**

2. Studies indicate that only 6% of adults with ASD are employed. Legally, when the student becomes 16 years of age, the IEP must include vocational training/integrated employment supports that are needed. To allow a longer timeframe for students to be exposed to career-focused instruction and functional training within a work-environment, our recommendation is:

- a. Incorporation of career-focused goals and objectives into the IEP when the student enters middle school (ages 12-13).** Introduction of a career focus during middle school, rather than waiting until the sophomore or junior year of high school will maximize the timeframe for acquisition of skills and interest regarding the work environment. Besides partnering with the local high schools to utilize and train student mentors, the middle school education team will partner with employers to maximize transitional success and job retention. The cost to Kern County Schools would be minimal and associated with specialized training for the educators (in service), adequate training for student mentors, and informational parent meetings. The outcome will be students entering high school with a broader level of career focus, as well as parents with a higher level of insight regarding employment for their sons and daughters. As with recommendation one, the potential cost savings of this recommendation would be measured over the life-span of each individual.

3. Individuals with ASD who have the cognitive ability and personal motivation to complete post-secondary education do not have the necessary supports to be successful in their educational pursuits. Our recommendation is:

- a. Forming a Kern County Community Colleges Consortium to develop a life skills program and specific career track for students with ASD at each college. The goal of the consortium would be to maximize the success of students with ASD by providing life skills instruction and training, along with the supports needed to complete their academic endeavor. This would require developing a plan to establish a partnership between the community college and the business community so that students will be able to secure a position in a specified career track after completion of their post-secondary education. In addition, developing a plan for continued career support as needed by the individual would be necessary. Forming the consortium would be cost negligible. The outcome of this recommendation would be that students with ASD would be able to enter the workforce as productive citizens. The potential cost savings would result from termination of Supplemental Security Income and an opportunity to secure insurance through employment, thereby reducing or eliminating reliance on Medi-Cal Insurance.

4. Many job development agencies do not require that job coaching staff have specialized training before or after employment, which reduces the potential for individuals with ASD to attain and maintain employment. Our recommendation is:

- a. Requiring all entry level staff working for job development companies to complete a standardized certificate program prior to employment. The Department of Rehabilitation, who contracts with the agencies, would be the catapult for this recommendation. The potential employee would personally finance the training and present the certification upon

employment. The outcome would be direct support paraprofessionals having an understanding of the challenges of individuals with ASD and the expertise to assist their clients to attain and maintain employment. The cost of this recommendation would be that entry-level employees would begin their career at a higher salary level. However, the quality of their services would benefit the agency's goal of securing and maintaining employment for individuals with ASD, which comes with monetary benefits. The job development agency would potentially experience less staff turnover, thereby reducing the expenses of training new employees.

5. Because of lack of knowledge of the ASD population, potential employees are reticent to hire these individuals. Our recommendation is:

- a. Training provided to the employers and staff regarding the challenges and benefits of hiring individuals with ASD.** The City of Bakersfield Mayoral HIRE Committee would connect with employers to provide information regarding the benefits of hiring this population, as well as conducting onsite training for the current employees of the company. The HIRE Committee is comprised of professionals who have the expertise to conduct the training. The cost should be negligible and the outcome would be more informed employers who understand the challenges of hiring someone with ASD as well as the financial and societal benefits.

6. Many parents believe that employment will permanently terminate their sons/daughter's SSI and Medi-Cal Benefits. As a result, they discourage employment. Our recommendation is:

- a. Disseminating information regarding the process and incentives of employment for individuals receiving SSI and Medi-Cal benefits.** Costs for a semi-annual workshop for parents would be shared by Kern Regional Center, job development agencies, additional KRC vendors, Department of Rehabilitation, and community businesses. The outcome of the recommendation is more informed parents who understand the process and realize the benefits of employment for their sons and daughters.